

ASOR Newsletter  
AMERICAN SCHOOLS OF ORIENTAL RESEARCH  
JERUSALEM AND BAGHDAD

ARCHAEOLOGICAL NEWSLETTER

Confidential

Not for publication

Newsletter #4

1952-53

November 3, 1952  
Jerusalem, Jordan

The time passes very quickly and it seems only yesterday that I was writing newsletter #3. We have had a very busy month and there seems little prospect of a let-up in the near future. We are now in the middle of a comparative lull - as much of a lull as there ever is at the American School - for we are all back at Jerusalem and not occupied with long field trips or excavations. Actually it is the period in which we try to estimate the results of the work just completed at Dhiban, prepare for the excavations at Old Testament Jericho which will start in about a month, and try to make the shorter School trips around the country-side and the Old City for which we have had no time until now. Perhaps it will be best to begin with a further account of our work at Dhiban.

We worked at Dhiban for three weeks only in November. The weather then became very uncertain. It was becoming quite cold - ice on our water in the mornings - and the cold was made more piercing by a strong east wind from the desert which also brought clouds of dust. There seemed to be little profit in removing earth from the excavation only to have it blown back in as the wind picked up our dumps. Dust in eyes, nose and mouth, on drawings, sections and everything else made work almost impossible. Also there were signs of a weather change and we were afraid that the winter rains might start in earnest and cut our road back to Jerusalem. So on Wednesday, the 19th, we reached a sudden decision to return to the School and not tempt the weather-man further.

There was little active searching for tombs in the last weeks of the dig for we needed to concentrate our efforts on the tell. But one Byzantine vaulted tomb was discovered and cleared in the comparatively flat area only about 100 yards in front of the site of our 1950-51 camp. Unfortunately the tomb had been robbed in antiquity but some small pieces, including an intact glass bottle, a bronze belt buckle with a cross on it and some bits of jewellery, probably are sufficient to date its original construction.

Another Byzantine tomb was found in the "temple" area at the same level as the three reported in the last newsletter. This unfortunately had been robbed and when found contained an upper, Muslim burial. Another tomb, still of unknown date, had utilized a large stone block, hollowed out and rounded inside at both ends as a sarcophagus, but it seems that the block had originally filled some other purpose which has not yet been ascertained.

The "temple" building itself is taking better shape. It is now possible to plan the walls of an early structure which was apparently incorporated into the building which now appears on the surface. An east-west interior wall apparently related to this earlier structure already shows three periods of building. Two parallel north-south walls run inwards, i.e. towards the north, from the south wall of this earlier structure, apparently supporting a vault which may have ~~been~~ covered the strange stone "sarcophagus" mentioned above. As usual, two voussoirs of this vault came to light on the last day of digging and had to be covered up again to await

further work in the spring. The dating of these earlier constructions is still somewhat unsure due to the presence of ancient fills which contain almost no pottery. Only when we can penetrate to the foundations can we expect to reach any certainty in this regard. The plan of the largest "temple" building, that called the "Nabataean Structure" in BASOR, No. 125, page 16, is now clear on three sides but the north side is still a puzzle. No wall corresponding to the other three has so far been found here. It is possible that the north wall of the earlier structure, referred to above, served also for the north wall of this period. We know from the stratification that this wall was preserved to a height approximating the present preserved height of the three outer walls of the later structure as late as the 6th or 7th century. Excavations at the north-east and north-west corners did not reach levels earlier than approximately the 7th century, so further work here may help to solve our problem.

At the south-east corner of this same building where it rests on or forms part of the corner bastion of the city walls, we carried our excavations down in an attempt to sort out and date the various wall components. We followed down the outer face of the Nabataean wall, carefully watching the changes of stratification and keeping the materials from each stratum carefully separate. By the end of the season we had distinguished no fewer than 26 strata, and we still have not reached the base of the wall. It is quite true that after a study of the pottery and the stratification itself, many of these strata originally distinguished can be treated as one deposit. Preliminary study would seem to indicate that the Nabataean wall with its upper Roman addition fell into complete disuse about the time of the Muslim conquest. Later Arab walls followed a different line. What seems to be ~~of~~ the latest of the Arab walls, although its date is still not established, can now be traced from the area excavated in 1950-51, north-east of where we were working this year, to the point at which it joins the outer wall of our "temple" building.

One week-end we decided to forego a day in Jerusalem to carry out a special project. The area in which the small fragment of a Moabite inscription was found in 1951 (see the publication by Father Murphy in BASOR, No. 125, page 20 ff.) was known and it seemed a good idea to search in this district for further fragments. One morning therefore we organized all our workmen into a search expedition. Most of them were formed into a long line, allowing about a meter between each person. They carried baskets, one to each two men. They then proceeded in line upwards from near the bottom of the tell to the top and to the western edge, picking up every black stone they could see. A small squad of men provided with picks followed them to disengage any stones which might be too large to be picked up or partially embedded in the ground. We made five sweeps in this way, covering a strip about 150 meters all told. When the stones were all collected, they were carried to the edge of the great pit excavated in 1950-51. There, members of the staff studied each piece carefully, and threw all rejects into the pit. In this way we ensured that the stones we studied would never again have to be gone over by our successors. We investigated well over a ton of black stones but there was "nary" an inscription among them. Our only finds of any importance were some good examples of sherds of medieval Arabic glazed ware and a few coins. Perhaps after the winter rains have exposed more stones, we can have another such search in the spring. There must be other fragments in the vicinity, but it is quite possible that they are buried under a mass of later deposit. Perhaps only major excavations at the north end of the tell will turn up more pieces. Such a project is planned for the spring if time and money are available.

Our friends will probably be interested in the progress of negotiations on the manuscripts from the Dead Sea. In my last letter I pointed out the critical need for funds to purchase the materials known to be in the hands of the Bedu or dealers. I can now report that the immediate crisis is past. The Jordan Government has generously put up a large sum of money to acquire all the materials available and up

till now unacquired by the Museum. In fact they are interested in purchasing the whole of the last find, and will re-imburse the Museum for that portion of this lot already acquired by it. Our financial problem, insofar as acquisition is concerned, is therefore temporarily at an end. But everyone recognizes the need for extensive exploration of the whole area by authorized expeditions with trained personnel. I am happy to report that plans already made and others still in the formative stage should go a long way to fill this need. An expedition conducted by Professor Lippens of Louvain University will work in the area for two or three months, beginning probably in January. The École Biblique is planning to continue work at Khirbet Qumran near Ain Feshka under the directorship of Père de Vaux. We can only wish these expeditions much luck in their efforts not only to discover new materials but to provide further archaeological evidence for the history of the various groups - The Essene Community, the followers of Bar Chochba and others - who were responsible for the deposits in the first place. Scholars such as Pères Barthelemy, Milik and De Vaux and Mr. Harding are hard at work on the fragments, sorting, identifying, translating and preparing the materials for publication as soon as possible. It is a privilege and a source of wonder to see them at work on the extremely fragile bits. Our student body has been given the opportunity to watch them and view the fragments either as they have been prepared for display under glass, or in the original "waste-paper" condition they were in when they first came into the Museum.

School trips are not being neglected. A very successful one was made in the two School cars to Teleilat Ghassul, the interesting Chalcolithic site east of the Jordan and just north of the Dead Sea. No work has been carried out here since the early thirties, but thousands of sherds and flints are scattered all over the site. One rather important discovery was made by Mr. Andry. He picked up a small shallow saucer, oval in shape, unlike anything published in the Ghassul volumes. He pointed out the spot to Mr. Fisher who immediately bent down and picked up another, although the second example was much more worn than the first. Mr. Andry of course realized that such a unique piece should be shown to Mr. Harding, the head of the Department of Antiquities, to see if he might wish to have it for the Amman Museum where the other materials from Teleilat Ghassul are on display. Mr. Harding appreciated the offer and took the piece and has promised to give Mr. Andry something in return for it. Another "find" was the remains of a large pot, in fragments, which when assembled at the School was found to lack both base and rim. It adds nothing to the Ghassulian repertoire so will probably remain at the School, with Mr. Harding's permission, as an example of this Chalcolithic ware.

Some of our students went off last week to visit the site of the Decapolis city of Gadara, now Umm Qeis. It enjoys a beautiful location high above the Yarmouk River and overlooking the Sea of Galilee. The remains of a theatre here are well worth seeing and other fine ruins lie just below the surface. Large-scale excavation here might reveal a fine Hellenistic-Roman city comparable to, although less extensive than Jerash to the south.

On one dusty afternoon while we were still working at Dhiban, work on the tell became impossible. The workers were therefore dismissed and an impromptu field trip was organized to Mt. Nebo and Madaba. The expedition was not only a sight-seeing one, although this in itself would make the trip worth-while. We also wanted to study the pottery from the excavations there at first hand, for we have found a small amount of comparable material at Dhiban. Such ceramic parallels would of course be expected, but it was rather the small quantity of such pottery found at Dhiban and the almost complete absence of certain types, which makes the comparison important. Tentatively we may suggest that the occupation of Dhiban did not continue on as long after the Muslim conquest as did the settlement at Mt. Nebo. This site possesses a marvellous view over the whole Jordan Valley and the "Promised Land" beyond. I have been told that it is possible to see Mt. Hermon on a clear day; unfortunately we never arrive on a clear day, but nevertheless the towers of Jerusalem in the distance rising out of the haze are quite distinct. The same



mosaic map on the floor of the Greek church in Madeba is something every tourist should try to see. It is still in a very good state of preservation, thanks to the wooden flooring which has been put in place over it to protect it. The colours are still fresh and clear especially when the guard wets them with water. The map of Jerusalem with its collonaded main street, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and other structures of the late Byzantine period are of interest in themselves and provide a prime source for the topography of Jerusalem in this period. Other shorter field trips were made from our base at Dhiban to Arair (Biblical Aroer) on the brink of the great canyon of the Biblical Arnon River and to Umm er-Rasas, the Byzantine settlement further north and east on the edge of the desert.

Last night we had the first of what we hope will be a series of tours of the Old City conducted by Mr. Stewart Perowne, now special assistant to the Bishop of Jerusalem in refugee relief work. His interest in and knowledge of all the odd corners and interesting spots are of great help. The moon was full and we spent about two hours walking through the almost deserted streets. During the daytime it is often difficult or impossible to see some of the interesting things for the crowds jostle one or stand about in curious groups. Also when the shops are open their shutters are thrown back against the wall on either side and hide much of what is there to be seen. The Old City by moonlight is an enchanted spot with its arches, vaults and buttresses, its towers, minarets, domes and crenellations, its winding streets, its ascents and sudden descents, its vestiges of Roman ruins side by side with Mediaeval Arabic and Crusader, its little churches and shrines tucked away so that it is virtually impossible to find an entrance or even to see them from the street, its atmosphere of dignity and age only slightly jarred by the blaring Arabic jazz coming over the radios in the coffee-shops. It is an intriguing old place and I can well understand how those who love it wonder at the crazy archaeologists who wander off a hundred miles to dig in some deserted spot hardly known to anyone but experts. They hardly realize the difficulties of excavating a city which is still very much occupied and in use and whose depth of deposit varies from zero over the rock outcroppings to hundreds of feet in such original hollows as the Tyropean valley. Nor can the most unromantic archaeologist lay hands on, or imperil the foundations of some comparatively modern religious edifice in order to probe below it.

It is sad to have to report that in the last few weeks serious signs of damage have appeared in the beautiful mosaics of the drum of the Dome of the Rock. They have been bulging for some years due to water being forced in behind them through the roof during the rain-storms of winter. But now some tesserae have actually fallen and others are threatening to come down. Professor Creswell studied them the other day and Professor Gauer, who is due to arrive in Jerusalem shortly to work on the restoration of the Khirbet el-Mefjer mosaics, will probably study them too and make recommendations. We can only hope that quick action will be taken to repair the roof so that the tedious and delicate operation of replacing and strengthening these ancient mosaics may be undertaken.

We have had only one visitor staying with us at the School during November. Professor Charles Braden of Northwestern is on the last lap of a round-the-world tour studying the result of the War and Communism on the different religions. It was good to have him with us.

As I shall not be writing to you again before Christmas, I want to take this opportunity of conveying to all our friends the best wishes for this coming Christmas season from my wife and myself and from all the students and staff of the Jerusalem School. We remember many of you individually from your visits here or from our contacts in the United States or Canada. But this greeting goes out not only to these but to the many others we have not yet had the opportunity of meeting and knowing. Please remember that a hearty welcome awaits any of you who

can come to visit us here in Jerusalem. We shall do everything possible to make your stay a profitable and happy one.

We wish you could join us in hearing the presentation of The Messiah in St. George's Cathedral this coming Sunday. Choirs from Jerusalem, Amman, Damascus and Beirut are joining together to make it a really festive occasion. The School is represented by Mr. and Mrs. Fisher. More of us would have participated if we had been in Jerusalem for the practices - and had the voices.

Again, we wish you all a most merry Christmas and a prosperous New Year.

A.D.Tushingham, Director.